

An Interview with Thomas Edward Seymour & Jonathan Gorman, Directors of Rudyard Kipling's Mark of the Beast

by **Mike Haberfelner**

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Films directed by **Thomas Edward Seymour** on (re)Search my Trash

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Your new movie *Mark of the Beast* - in a few words, what is it about?

Thomas Edward Seymour: A man desecrates a native shrine and is then cursed by a silver faceless leper from within the woods. His friends then hunt the leper and torture it to try to get him to lift the curse. To me Kipling is asking the question how far would you ruin yourself morally to save your friend. It's an anti-torture film but aims to play as an old fashioned monster movie. Jon and I were influenced by classic monster films and Italian horror from the 60's and 70's.

What inspired you to adapt a Rudyard Kipling-short story - and what were the challenges of translating this circa century old story set in India to the contemporary rural USA? And do you hold a special fondness of Rudyard Kipling's work to begin with?

Thomas Edward Seymour: When I first moved to New York I needed a job right away so I worked at the Strand Bookstore. I came across the Kipling's story and thought it was just great material. Like *Beowulf*, but had some important themes about torture and religion. To me it wasn't that difficult to pull the story out of India because it was really more about the people than the region and it was a small story. We tried to confuse the time period. You might assume that the film took place anywhere from the late 60's to modern day. There's almost no technology, the only car you see is from the 60's and people's clothes tended to look like older fashions. The weather was warm climate and part of the cast had southern accents. We were going for a mysterious time and place to some degree and I feel like people either buy into the reality or they don't.

Jonathan Gorman: We had talked about trying to find a classic work that was in the public domain and was not too overdone. Tom had come across the story and emailed it to me. It is a really cool and creepy tale. He decided to adapt it and try to modernize the story and blur the time period in order to make it work with our budgetary constraints. My favorite Rudyard Kipling tale is *Rikki Tikki Tavi*, the one about the mongoose. I can't say that I have a particular fondness for Kipling, but what I am familiar with I enjoy.

Thomas, you've written the script together with one of the film's stars and producers Sheri Lynn - so what can you tell us about your writing process and your co-writer as such?

Thomas Edward Seymour: Well I wrote the rough draft myself and tried to keep as much of the original dialogue and narration as possible. Two of my hero's are Frank Darabont and Morgan Freeman. In *The Shawshank Redemption* you had Morgan Freeman's character speaking this wonderful poetic and sensitive narration, but when he was among his friends in the prison or in crisis he would speak like a normal guy. You know, swear and such. Freeman did this in *Million Dollar Baby* as well. I thought that with Kipling's story I could do the same thing. Be regal in the narration and real in the dialogue. People either love it or hate it. My friend Sheri Lynn functioned more as an editor cleaning up my messy grammar and tweaking a few scenes. She was a great help as always.

Your main claim to fame (as a duo) so far has probably been the rather comedic trio of *Bikini Bloodbath*-movies - so what prompted you to try your hands on the rather serious story of *Mark of the Beast*?

Thomas Edward Seymour: I think that you're right. If anyone knows who the hell we are it's probably because *Bikini Bloodbath 1-3*. Those movies were so much fun. I haven't done a feature length drama since *Everything Moves Alone* in 2001 when *Elvis Mitchell* of the *New York Times* took a shit on my career. I had done genre blenders like *Land of College Prophets* and *London Betty* but I really wanted to take a step forward in my career and I felt that the material I could create would never be good enough. In a sense I looked again to Frank Darabont. He took Steven King's stories and adapted them to perfection. *Shawshank*, *Green Mile*, *The Mist*. When you can't make progress in the budgets you get, you try to find ways to make progress. That was the thought process anyway. Jon

Gorman is a great directing partner and I think he wanted to try something different in his career as well. But please don't think we're getting all serious on you. We're supposed to start writing Bikini Bloodbath 4 soon.

- **Jonathan Gorman:** Tom and I are really big fans of [Hammer](#) Horror and the films of Paul Naschy [[Paul Naschy bio - click here](#)]. We wanted to get involved in a project where we could create that kind of atmosphere and look. We wanted to really focus on the lighting and longer takes. While comedy is our natural habitat, we have always wanted to try our hand (or hands, as the case may be) at more serious horror.

- **I for one see [Mark of the Beast](#) very much in the tradition of drive-in monster movies of old - something you would at all agree with? And what can you tell us about your movie's directorial style as such?**

- **Thomas Edward Seymour:** Yeah, I'm a big of the [Frankenstein](#). Well, the 1931 Boris Karloff one [[Boris Karloff bio - click here](#)], not that weird one that Edison did in 1910 [[click here](#)]. I also really like [Creature from the Black Lagoon](#).

- **Jonathan Gorman:** Yeah, we did sort of view this as our first creature feature. While the leper may be a man, he has been disfigured over time to become something that a human cannot easily identify with. He is something to be feared because he is human but also something other.

What can you tell us about your movie monster, and the film's at times quite uncomfortable special effects?

- **Thomas Edward Seymour:** Leigh Radziwon is a dear friend of ours. Jon and I sat down with her and brainstormed about how the creature should look but she really took the ball and ran with it. I have never worked on a set with such an amazing special effects makeup artist. We owe Leigh a lot. I believe we got positive reviews on sites like yours and [Ain't it Cool](#) or articles in [Fangoria](#) specifically because of Leigh's hard work. It took over 8 hours to turn Marc Bovino into the Silver Faceless Leper. Leigh had three assistants working the whole time and they never seemed to ever take a break. It was an exhausting long ten day shoot.

Jonathan Gorman: The monster was envisioned by Tom and brought to life by Leigh Radziwon and Marc Bovino. Leigh created the make up effects and Marc delivered a wonderful performance as "the beast". Leigh and her team would spend hours getting Mark into the beast make up (I think it took 6 hours, and longer on the first day). When Mark had the head piece on, he could only see out of a very small, obstructed hole with one eye. He would have to be led around set. Marc never complained and always delivered in his performances. The idea for the make up was to obscure the features enough to give the main characters the ability to torture the leper. If the leper is a beast and not human, then torturing it would be a little easier for our characters to push themselves into.

Your cast is led by horror icon Debbie Rochon [[Debbie Rochon interview - click here](#)], who of course has also been in your [Bikini Bloodbath](#)-movies - why her and what is it like working with her?

- **Thomas Edward Seymour:** She has wonderful ideas and helps to improve every project she is in. She worked with Sheri Lynn on her scenes and she had great ideas for her character. I am very proud to call her my friend. She has had such a large part in the success of [Mark of the Beast](#). She is one of the most important figures in the American contemporary B-movie and underground film movement. She has acted in over 200 films. She's an incredible actress and a good person and to me that matters most.

Jonathan Gorman: Debbie is the best, she has always been great on and off-screen. We love working with Debbie. She has a great sense for comedy which has always worked great in the [Bikini Bloodbath](#) films. We wanted Debbie for [Mark of the Beast](#) for many reasons, but most importantly, because we knew she could handle the role. Debbie was great on set as usual, offering us tips on how to get our actors to the right level of intensity, and she asked questions about her character to help get herself in the right mindset. She is a wealth of knowledge and a pleasure to work with. She really gave a great performance, just like we knew she would.

- **What can you tell us about the rest of the cast of [Mark of the Beast](#), and what made them perfect for their roles?**

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Thomas Edward Seymour: What happened was when I read the story for whatever reason I pictured the Fleete character as Phil Hall and the Strickland character as Dick Boland. I always thought Dick had the face a 60's/70's actor. That sort of full, "man's man" look, and I knew Phil Hall would be able to deliver lines like "I'm gorgeously drunk" and nail it. I don't think I had to update any on Fleete's lines from the original story. With Debbie's character I left it pretty much the same as the short story. Though the role was written for a man. It didn't really matter to me. A hero is a hero. I just had to tweak a few minor details.

Jonathan Gorman: Dick Boland played Strickland. We have worked with Dick on 2 of the ***Bikini Bloodbath***-movies and ***London Betty*** - all of which were comedies. Dick brings a level of intensity and commitment to everything he does. He was the perfect Strickland. He did a great job and he is always really invested in the characters he plays. Phil Hall has worked with us many times before. He is a fantastic character actor. He was our first choice for the role of Fleete. He plays an excellent drunk and he is up for anything (including full frontal nudity, and being tied to a chair under hot lights while being pelted with salt, water, oil and worms). Sheri plays Strickland's wife and has worked with us on all of the ***Bikini Bloodbath***-films and ***London Betty*** both in front and behind the camera. Sheri has predominantly done comedy with us, but she is an intense person and is incredibly focused. We knew she was up for the task.

Mark of the Beast is confined to merely a handful of locations and a limited cast - I guess first and foremost for budgetary reasons. In what way was this limiting or actually inspiring, and what would you have done differently had you had a bigger budget at hand?

Thomas Edward Seymour: We shot the whole film at my friend's mother-in-laws. It was this camp or sorts. It had the cabins, the pond, the forest. We didn't have to waste large amounts of time driving around to change locations. We decided to do longer takes with more blocking and less coverage. Similar to how older films were shot. You know, not all the hyper-cutting and such. This actually let us concentrate on the actors and lighting more. We were going for that tattered old horror film look. Some people love the look of this film, some people don't but it wasn't by accident you know? The shoots are always extremely hard on me physically. Very long days, lugging around lights and camera gear. Having to keep the entire story arch of the film right at the tip of your brain to make sure the actors never stepped outside on your vision. Shooting a film in 10 days beats the shit out of you and I've done it 8 times now. I had to DP half the film and my friends Greg Kissner and Aaron Syler were able to DP the rest. I do have to say however that I feel because we knew we were trying to make a little feature horror film, I think it's the closest I have ever come to making a film that looked how I imagined it. If I could have done it different I would have hired a full crew and shot over the course of a few months. I probably would have kept the same cast. More and more these new "A-lister" actors are becoming so boring to me. I mean what the hell! Why does everyone in Hollywood films have to be so fucking young and beautiful. Most Hollywood films are totally unbelievable to me. Oh look a gang of male models are eating in the cafeteria in the ***Twilight*** films. Or hey Andrew Garfield a guy who looks like he stepped out a Calvin Klein ad is getting picked on in high school in the new ***Spider-Man*** movie. That dude would never get picked on! If those bastards in Hollywood ever re-re-make ***The Shining*** ... again - do you think they will cast someone who looks like Shelly Duval or someone who looks like Jessica Alba?

Jonathan Gorman: The smaller cast is definitely budgetary, but it also allows us more time to focus on the characters and their performances. It also allows more time to construct shots and sets, and to focus on lighting and creating atmosphere. With the ***Bikini*** films, there is never enough time, you are always scrambling and re-writing and rescheduling. With this film, we were able to get the entire cast to commit to the time, there were very few (possibly only one - that I can recall) reschedules. We had more crew than cast for the first time ever on a set. It was a great experience.

What can you tell us about the actual shoot and the on-set atmosphere?

Thomas Edward Seymour: It was pretty light and friendly. There was a boys cabin and a girls cabin. Most of the folks were from the ***Bikini Bloodbath*** films so we were all wondering if we would even be able to pull off a serious horror film. As I remember the first scene we shot did not go so well. We didn't even know we had a film until the end of that first day. It was stressful and people worked hard but it was friendly and pretty light for cast members considering the subject matter.

Jonathan Gorman: The shoot was in a beautiful location out in Voluntown, CT - Still Waters (<http://www.retreatcenterct.com>). We lived out there all together for 10 days. It really got the cast and crew in the spirit of the film. We would wake up, eat breakfast and begin to work. At night we would swim in the lake and barbecue. Everyone would hang out around a fire nerding off about movies.

As far as I know, the film has only come out not too long ago - so what can you tell us about critical and audience reception so far?

Thomas Edward Seymour: So far the reviews had exceeded my expectations. There was a strong fear that we would get our ass handed to us for taking on a Kipling story. Some of the larger horror reviewers and magazines like *Aint' it Cool*, *Film Threat* and *Fangoria* have really gotten behind the film. I think *Rue Morgue* is doing a piece on the film soon. I would say on average about three out of four reviews I've come across are either positive or neutral. Haters are gonna hate but you can't change that. Some negative reviews have incorrect information like claiming the DVD has no special features. One review actually throws other larger review sites under the bus just because they liked my film. The internet is strange place. People will bash you, try to demoralize, deprofessionalize, delegitimize you, take your pick. Getting bad reviews is not really a big deal to me. I just don't like when they say things that are factually incorrect. I'm not sure what they get out of it, the bashing I mean. They complain all day long about terrible Hollywood films and then throw indie filmmakers under the bus just as they're starting off while they're refining their craft or trying to get bigger budgets. Indie filmmakers do not have tons of money to pour into marketing to counteract reviews. So on the internet, critics have the power, not to destroy Hollywood films but to destroy Independent films. I wonder if they realize that? When my film **London Betty** was finished I tried to get some reviews online before seeking distribution. For the most part the reviews were very positive but the first review I got, they gave it a C or something and it was cited by a distribution company I was trying to place the film with as one of the reasons that they wouldn't take it because they weren't sure it would do well critically. Even though many of the reviews to follow were strong the company was no longer interested but by then we had different deal with *Maverick Entertainment*, so we went with them.

Jonathan Gorman: It is a mixed bag, as it has been with all of our films. I have seen some great reviews, some terrible reviews and some inbetween.

Let's go back to the beginnings of your careers - what got you into filmmaking in the first place, and did you receive any formal education on the subject?

Thomas Edward Seymour: When I was around 12 I started shooting Super 8 films. Just after highschool I had a public access show and in College I finished my first feature **Thrill Kill Jack in Hale Manor** starring Carmine Capobianco. I think we had a 200 dollar budget. It is a terrible film, Carmine was good though. I graduated from Northwestern Connecticut College with a degree in Visual Communication. I started working for **CBS News** as a staff editor after that. Did that for four years. Did work for places like *NBC Universal Digital Studios*, *Fisher Price*, *IGN*, *College Humor*, all the while I was doing little feature films on the side. **Mark of the Beast** is actually my 8th feature. I'm working on a new Feature length Doc called **VHS Massacre** with filmmaker Kenneth Powell and David Leute right now. We are co-directing. It's been a lot of fun so far.

Jonathan Gorman: For me, **Evil Dead 2** was the first film I remember watching and thinking: "I can do that." I remember loving it and watching it over and over again. I remember reading anything I could get my hands on about Sam Raimi and Bruce Campbell. The way they talked about making **Evil Dead 2** sounded like so much fun and so possible. Tom started making movies way before me. We became friends through his brother (and **Bikini Bloodbath** producer) Bruce Seymour. I went to screenings of Tom's movies and we had always talked about doing a project together and eventually we made **Bikini Bloodbath**. I took a history of film class at Emerson College, but my real training was on the set and watching as many movies as I could get my hands on.

What can you tell us about your filmwork prior to **Mark of the Beast**?

Thomas Edward Seymour: Between *Black20*, *IGN* and *College Humor* I think I've done over 50 shorts. For Indie film I've directed 8 features. I did a lot of popular mashups back in the day. Some of these are kinda low-fi but they're kinda funny. You may have seen them before.

Cake Town - http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=gNqiSkd1M6k

Battle of the Batmans - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oSkSDN1w4E>

Uwe Boll's Contra - http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L-W_TvrOmiwgoogle.com

Quantum of Bonds - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=deNG0SW3aDk>

Eastwood and Aliens - <http://blog.collegehumor.com/post/6797540977/eastwood-aliens-the-good-the-bad-and-the>

Jonathan Gorman: I played a couple of dead bodies in some re-shoots for *Land of College Prophets*. I worked in the art department on a film called *Second Chances* about a crippled girl and a crippled horse, I played a drifter in a short called *Texas Kiss* (no one will ever see that, my good friend and the director of the short, has suppressed any

copies of it), I played Jesus in a short called What Would Jesus Do, I co-wrote, co-produced, and co-directed the Bikini Bloodbath trilogy, I was the 1st AD on London Betty and I played an old man in London Betty named Stanley.

- **Any future projects you'd like to talk about?**

- **Thomas Edward Seymour:** Well I've been co-hosting the New York Cine Radioshow for the past year with Kenneth Powell and David Leute. We have so much fun doing it we decided to team up to direct a new feature length Documentary about the B-movies and the home video era called **VHS Massacre** - it should have all the bloodbath gang including Debbie Rochon, Lloyd Kaufman and Carmine Capobianco and Jon Gorman but we'll see. We've been working on it for the past few months. Also I think Jon and I will write **Bikini Bloodbath 4** at some point and see where it takes us.

- **Jonathan Gorman:** Tom and I have been kicking around Ideas about **Bikini Bloodbath 4**. There are always other ideas kicking around, but nothing slid as of yet.

- **You both also tend to appear in front of the camera on occasion (as you do in *Mark of the Beast*) - so what can you tell us about yourselves, the actors, and do you at all enjoy this?**

- **Thomas Edward Seymour:** I do like acting but it's very hard to do well when you are directing. I've stepped back from acting a bit but I have friends who occasionally ask me to act and I suppose if a cool role was offered to me I would do it. I think my friend Greg Kissner wants me to act in his new feature **Viking Vs Zombies** (<http://www.vikingsvszombies.com/>) and I'm gonna be in our new doc as well.

- **Jonathan Gorman:** Tom acts, he is really good at it. He has been honing his craft over the years. I am more of bit character, the biggest role I have had to date was Stanley in **London Betty**. It was a lot of fun. I enjoy being in front of the camera, but I prefer being behind it. I have also been a random thug who gets killed and has no lines in 3 shorts by Curtis Spieler. I like to get out in front of the camera, but I can not really do anything all that serious.

- **How would you describe yourselves as directors?**

- **Thomas Edward Seymour:** I feel like I will always be learning and trying to improve. I think I'm getting pretty good and making a compelling feature for under 10 grand. It would be great if one day I'd be offered a gig to direct **Puppet Master 8** or **Universal Soldier 7** or something. Beyond that I'm not sure if I'm really in sync with what the studio system is creating these days. Too much CGI, mindless action and model actors. Too little real sets, real creature effects and normal looking people in films these days.

- **Jonathan Gorman:** I think Tom and I function really well as a team. We are interested in a lot of the same styles of film as well as having the same sense of humor. We are able to step in and step back depending on the needs of the moment and for the most part, we tend to do it pretty fluidly. There are always hard times on any film set, especially low budget film sets, but Tom and I always help each other through.

- **Filmmakers who inspire you?**

- **Thomas Edward Seymour:** **El Mariachi** by Robert Rodriguez was a real inspiration. A great film for 9 grand. **Sin City** was great too. An actual good use of CGI for once. John Carpenter and George Romero are gods. I wish I could be as talented as Ridley Scott.

- **Jonathan Gorman:** Sam Raimi, Jean-Luc Godard, Lloyd Kaufman, Sam Fuller, William Castle, Terence Fisher [[Terence Fisher bio - click here](#)], Lars Von Trier, the Coen brothers, Wes Anderson.

- **Your favourite movies?**

- **Thomas Edward Seymour:** I love films like **Blade Runner**, **Shawshank Redemption**, **Cinderella Man**. I love Hitchcock's **Rope**, **Frankenstein**(1931), **Logan's Run**. To be honest I love bad actions films from the 80's like **The Best of the Best**, **Blind Fury** and **Robot Jox**. I'd love to work with Rutger Hauer some day. I'll watch almost anything directed by Ridley Scott or Terry Gilliam. Nolan is great too. **The Following**, **Memento**, **Prestige**. Aronofsky's **Pi**. Dario Argento's **Opera**. Tommy Wisaeu's **The Room** (I seriously like that movie). Clint Eastwood's **Unforgiven**.

- **Jonathan Gorman: Royal Tannebaums, Evil Dead 2, Halloween** (John Carpenter), **Port of Shadows, Pierrot Le Fou, Melancholia, Pick-up on South Street, Le Samourai.**

- ... and of course, films you really deplore?

- **Thomas Edward Seymour: Magic Mike.** Because my film **Mark of the Beast** came out the same week and on the web and in all the stores the only thing you would see it **Magic Mike** coverage - and because of alphabetical order **Magic Mike** was always first. Some websites just said "**Magic Mike** and other releases this week" and the other releases were *Blade Runner 30th Edition*, my film and others. It was as if Channing Tatum's dong itself was covering over the DVD release of **Mark of the Beast**. Fuck you Channing...fuck you.

- Your/your movie's website, Facebook, whatever else?

- Markofthebeastfilm.com, Newyorkcine.com.

- Thanks for the interview!

- Thanks for reaching out to us, we really appreciate it!

- [http://www.searchmytrash.com/articles/thomasedwardseymourjonathangorman\(12-12\).shtml](http://www.searchmytrash.com/articles/thomasedwardseymourjonathangorman(12-12).shtml)